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## **A SPORTSMAN'S WANDERINGS**









AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.





# A SPORTSMAN'S WANDERINGS

BY

J. G. MILLAIS

AUTHOR OF

"A BREATH FROM THE VELDT," "BRITISH DIVING DUCKS," "THE MAMMALS OF  
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND," "NEWFOUNDLAND AND ITS UNTRODDEN  
WAYS," "THE LIFE OF F. C. SELOUS, D.S.O.," ETC.

*WITH 4 COLLOTYPE PLATES AND 11 OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS  
FROM AUTHOR'S DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS*

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS book describes incidents of my own life and in the lives of others I have known; travels in search of big game and Natural History; letters of strange interest by all kinds of men living in many lands; sidelights on the Great War, in fact a conglomeration of anything in life that might prove of interest to men and women who move about and do things a little out of the ordinary ruck. They have been set down rather as the spirit moved me to write, and if somewhat disjointed, I trust they will appeal to other rovers like myself. If variety is the spice of life, perhaps even such tales as these may find their readers amongst those who have followed the open road.

J. G. MILLAIS.

*Compton's Brow, Horsham.  
July 1919.*

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## WANDERINGS AND MEMORIES

### CHAPTER I

#### WHEN I WAS YOUNG

ONE autumn day in 1871 a little boy of six stood in a garden in Scotland, lost in contemplation of an old muzzle-loading gun leaning against a hedge. Duncan the gardener had left it there—loaded, of course, and at full cock—and gone to his dinner. The small man was torn with doubts and fears. Being convinced of the inefficiency of a crude catapult he had purchased at old Thomas Lee's shop in George Street, Perth; now he saw before him visions of real slaughter amongst the sparrows sitting amongst the pea-sticks, for he was a hunter by instinct. Had he not seen Duncan fire off that terrible weapon without suffering personal damage? He wanted to handle real dead game shot by himself, and the temptation proved irresistible, although he knew sore limbs and a possible thrashing for touching loaded firearms might ensue.

After balancing the gun on a spade-handle and pulling both triggers at once, he knew of nothing but stars for a moment, and then found himself lying on his back with a damaged arm and singing head. He made certain, too, his jaw was broken. Worst of all, there was no game to retrieve. Where-



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fore then and there he made a vow that all the blandishments and temptations in the world could not induce him to fire a gun again in his lifetime. The consequences were too fearful, and how Duncan had the strength and courage to do it he could not understand. Duncan, indeed, must be a Hercules at least, and therefore entitled to intense respect.

After this unfortunate episode, the desire to possess specimens of birds being undiminished, I resolved to study and achieve some skill with that much misunderstood little weapon, the catapult, as it seemed to offer certain possibilities of being made fairly accurate, and could not, at any rate, mangle its user in the same way as firearms. I practised assiduously, but it was not until I went to Marlborough, at the age of eleven, that another boy, named "Viper" Clark, who was a splendid shot, initiated me into the mysteries of the small, square "tweaker" elastic—how to put on the bag and make a hard fork from privet, properly burnt in the flame of a candle. He also instructed me in several important items, such as weight of shot according to size of elastic, shape and use of chamois-leather bag, how to adjust rubber to fork and bag to avoid fraying in use, and, most important of all, how to keep elastic at the right temperature. All these and other details are essential to the boy who would achieve success with the insignificant little "tweaker," and I worked so hard to improve my shooting—being then perfectly absorbed both in the hunting and preservation of my specimens—that I soon surpassed my master, and became the leader of a gang of what my tutors described as "undisciplined young reprobates, who spent their

time fighting with town boys or wandering aimlessly in the forest."

In consequence, although my ornithological collection benefited by over two hundred species of British birds, the four years spent at Marlborough were marked by constant trouble and disgrace, although personally I never felt I was doing anything to be ashamed of. I was the only boy who ever went through Marlborough and was birched by the Head Master four times (all for catapulting) without being expelled. Boys were warned by their parents against me as being a bad character, and at that time my very harmless offence was bracketed in the category of the worst crimes. At Eton and other schools no one thinks much of a "swishing," but at Marlborough, between the years 1878-1881, a boy swished by the Head Master was considered to be quite beyond the pale, and if the punishment was repeated he was usually expelled with ignominy. No master at that time seemed to have the faintest notion that a boy could be so absorbed in the collection of specimens of natural history that he would take all risks, both of corporal punishment and lines (which were worse), as well as being held up to disgrace, for the sake of his hobby. With me the obsession was like that of a dog who has killed a sheep, there was no cure, so I went through some of the happiest as well as the bitterest times of my life under a cloud of universal reprobation.

Only "Dicky" Richardson, the master of the lower school, used to be interested in the sketches I did in the forest. When he left Marlborough as an old man a few years ago, his pupils subscribed

a gift of £100 so that he might buy any present he fancied, and thus he wrote to me: "The boys have given me £100 to do with as I like, and the first thing I shall do with it is to buy all your books and present them to the school library. I always believed in you, and knew you would make good." That was very nice of him, but somehow I wish he had said that to me when I was young and wanted some encouragement and help. It would have meant so much.

Though it is probable that some of the punishments were well deserved, it was not always the case. The severest imposition I received was for an act committed by another boy. One day, coming off the playing-fields, I met my friend "Viper," and he showed me a long-range catapult he had just made, and to exhibit its accuracy he fired three shots at a hen walking in Lynes' farmyard, about eighty yards away. The aim of the third was so good that it took the unfortunate bird in the head and rolled it over in the throes of death. At this moment one of Lynes' men appeared on the scene, and grasping the situation, at once ran up the hill towards us. The correct policy would have been to have stood our ground, but "Viper," being seized with panic, ran for the Porter's Lodge. I accompanied him. At the very moment that my friend placed his catapult and shot under some cushions, the Porter came out, and Lynes' man arriving in hot haste on the scene, we were fairly caught.

Next day, much to the disgust of my House Master, F. E. Thompson, we were haled before the Head Master, the Rev. G. C. Bell, to whom "Viper" honourably admitted the offence, and explained

that I had been merely a spectator, and in no way connected with the death of the hen. After giving me a lecture, the "Head" "swished" Viper and acquitted me. Not so my House Master, who made me come in every afternoon of the half-holidays during the whole of the summer term and write out Milton's "Paradise Lost" twice over. Seeing that the Head Master had absolved me from blame, I thought it was a most unfair and even inhuman punishment, and ever afterwards I bore a grudge against "Jick" and loathed Milton and all his works.

I had many adventures in the course of my wanderings in the forest of Savernake and "out of bounds" up and down the River Kennet. The following incident is one that always remains in my mind, as it afforded myself and many other boys much amusement.

At all public schools there is always a master who does not play games, and is chiefly concerned in doing police work in the neighbouring country, accompanied by boys who act as his toadies and spies. His object is to arrest marauders like myself, who are ever breaking out of bounds and performing illegal acts contrary to school discipline. Though all my time was spent within his sphere of influence, I had always managed to outwit "Pat" Drury and his satellites, and, though arrested by others, he had so far failed to catch me *flagrante delicto*.

One summer afternoon I was busily pursuing a flock of Longtailed Tits in the forest of Savernake, being then about two hundred yards from the edge of the forest, and was in the act of shooting, when, happening to glance around, I saw "Pat" advanc-

ing towards me with rapid strides. It was the work of a moment to put my cap over my face and run for the forest edge, where there was a high beech-tree, which I had once been up for a Stock Dove's nest. I had a good start, and reached this tree some two hundred yards ahead of my pursuer. Being then a good climber, and guessing that Pat was a poor one, it was not long before I was sixty feet up, and well concealed amidst the leafy branches. "Pat" paused at the foot of the tree and called out—

"Come down at once, boy, I know who you are."

For a moment I hesitated, and then, as he had not mentioned my name, I remained *perdu*.

After a time he tried blandishments and then threats, even giving my name, but in such a doubtful manner that I knew he was not certain. Accordingly I remained perfectly quiet. Pat sat at the foot of the tree for an hour, and then got up and marched off down the hill to where a stile intercepted some fields leading to the railway line, which he would have to cross in going to the school.

Now from my elevated perch I had a very clear view of the line, and as I did not see him cross it, I concluded he had hidden himself somewhere near the stile and was waiting for me to fall into his clutches. Another half an hour went by, when suddenly I saw his figure outlined against the sky crossing the railway between two trucks.

A brilliant idea then seized me. Supposing I could reach the school ahead of "Pat," I could prove an *alibi*. It was possible but not probable, but I resolved to try it by a way I knew.

About a quarter of a mile above the Kennet Bridge, the main road to the school, and above "Treacle Bolly" (a long line of trees), was a narrow part of the river which it was possible to ford in summer. This point lay amidst water meadows almost opposite the school chapel, whose gates were kept locked. The great obstacle to entering the school by this route was the high and spiked palings, about eleven feet high, round the school quadrangle. I had never been over them, and doubted my ability to climb them, but resolved to try as my only chance.

Rapidly descending the beech, I ran all the way down the chalk hills, avoided the Kennet Bridge, where Pat might still be waiting, raced through "Treacle Bolly," and pulling off my trousers, socks and boots, waded the river, which took me to the armpits. Once on the other side, I redressed and stuffed my shirt, which had, of course, become soaked, into my trousers, and then ran across the meadows till I reached the high palings of the school quadrangle. Their height and formidable appearance at first appalled me, but it had to be done.

These iron palings, with long spikes on the top, were more or less hidden from view from the school side by a row of lime-trees, so, although the courtyard was crowded—it was "call" time—only a few boys saw my ineffectual efforts to climb the railings. I got to the top, and managed to get one leg over, when, slipping on the spikes, one of them went clean through my coat and held me fast. Had it not been for the help of two good Samaritans, who came to the rescue and released first the coat and then myself, I should have been forced to call for

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help, and that would have made a scene, and possibly called the attention of some meddlesome Sixth Form boy or a master.

Once in safety I found one of my friends, and instructed him to watch the main road approach to the Porter's Lodge and to tell of the advent of "Pat" Drury. Scarce a minute elapsed when he announced the coming of the master, so, taking my friend's arm, we strolled out, and as we passed him took off our caps in the approved fashion.

"Pat" stood perfectly still in the middle of the road staring at me. He was too much astonished even to say a word. I had proved an *alibi*.

The result of this little adventure, of course, became school gossip, and it was not long before "Pat" heard how he had been outwitted. No master likes being made fun of, and, though the boys enjoyed the joke, the subject thereof swore he would lay himself out to catch me, and how he eventually succeeded is another story.

As all who have been at public schools know, there is always a certain rivalry and even enmity between the boys of the school and those of the town. Marlborough was not different from other places. There were groups of rough boys who liked to get up a fight on some pretext, and take what they considered some of the conceit out of the boys of the college. Fights of any magnitude were rare, but there was one small gang, led by a big red-haired boy named Dixon, who used stones and catapults, and who never failed to attack my little band whenever opportunity offered.

Dixon was my arch-enemy, and was a good shot. I had had two single-handed duels with him. In

the first I got the worst of it, having run out of ammunition. He then caught me, and being a much bigger and stronger boy, gave me a good thrashing. Some months afterwards we met again one day in "Treacle Bolly" and had a battle royal, each from behind a tree at a distance of about twenty-five yards. He hit me twice, and then, as he raised his right hand to shoot, I got him exactly right on the knuckles, when he dropped his catapult and fairly howled. Then he ran, and I got him twice more before he was out of shot. His catapult I still have as a trophy of the chase.

The end of my days at Marlborough had arrived, and I was to leave the school, and was not sorry. Having escaped detection for a whole year, my supposititious virtue resulted in an invitation to breakfast with the Head Master, "Ullage,"<sup>1</sup> a great honour. He was very kind, and hoped I would now lead a "new" life, and had given up catapulting; and I remember his Wiltshire sausages were of the best. That afternoon my chosen band, Miller,<sup>2</sup> Mangles, Cayley,<sup>3</sup> and two others, whose names I forget, went for a grand final foray in the forest. We were all well armed and had plenty of shot. It had been a great day, and we had each killed several birds and were in high spirits as we descended the last hill of the downs near Kennet Bridge. At this

<sup>1</sup> "Ullage" was the school nickname for the Very Reverend Canon Bell. One day he asked the Sixth Form the meaning of the word "ullage," and no one could answer him. So he took down a dictionary and read out with solemnity, "Ullage—all filth." That name stuck to him all his years at Marlborough. He was a good, kind man, and we all respected him.

<sup>2</sup> Captain Miller, the famous polo player.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Cayley, a well-known angler and sportsman.



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moment a band of town boys emerged from the foot of the hill and advanced towards us. We were in no mood for fighting. Each group passed the other eyeing one another like two dogs that remember former battles.

Dixon made some sneering remark, but, as all our weapons were ready and loaded, he passed on. It was, however, only the lull before the storm.

The critical moment seemed to have passed, when a severe blow and a stinging sensation on the inside of my right leg made me almost drop to the ground. One of the town boys had hit me with a small stone, and I still carry the mark of the cut. Arthur Cayley whipped round and got to work at once, and in less than a minute we were all in the thick of as fierce a fight with shot and stones as I ever remember. Our opponents mustered about twenty. They had Dixon, who was a good shot, and about seven others with large catapults, the rest using stones, whilst our five were all picked shots using small "tweakers," which up to thirty yards have a considerable accuracy. Singling out Dixon, whom I knew was the leader and the most dangerous man, in the first minute I hit him in the face. Owing to this success we advanced, and the faint-hearted ones soon broke and ran, shortly afterwards followed by the rest.

Perhaps we ought to have been satisfied at this success, but our blood was up, and we chased the enemy right up over the hill and across the line, where they took up a formidable position on a long stone-heap lying parallel with the railway, whilst we in turn got cover from some trucks. An indecisive engagement then ensued for some ten

minutes, when, on the advent of a small urchin from the town, we retired into a "loose box," and gave the boy sixpence to go across the no man's land and say we had retired.

A great surprise attack must be the *coup de grâce*, and how eagerly we watched the "Townees" leave their fortifications and come across to our lately occupied trenches! As they stooped to pass through the trucks we leaped out upon them, and then the squeals of pain, the result of shots at close range, were only broken by a rush of newcomers in the shape of "Pat" Drury and his satellites. We were fairly caught. A sad ending indeed to a great day.

Next morning we stood in a line before the "Head," and I could not help thinking how different were the circumstances of the moment to those of the previous day.

The Rev. G. C. Bell gave us the usual homily on the dastardly nature of our offence, adding—

"As for you, Millais, I fear you are quite incorrigible and will come to a bad end. What on earth do you do it for?"

I could only hang my head, but blurted out—

"For scientific purposes, sir."

"Good Heavens, boy!" he gasped; "do you mean to say that catapulting small (*sic*) boys in the region of the—er—er—posterior can be done for the sake of science?"

Then followed the usual harrowing scene, in which the Head Master, two strong Sixth Form boys, a birch and a struggling victim played their parts. "Ullage" was always supposed to be very "slack" and half asleep, but I know, having tested